

Knowledge and enthusiasm equal top notch shop

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207th MPAD

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - The small shop is a partitioned-off section tucked away in the corner of a large maintenance bay on the Southern side of the camp. The toolboxes and shelves contain calipers, screw drivers, pliers and hammers. Metallic organizers hide odd parts, screws and springs in dozens of small drawers. Rubber matting covers the surface of the worktables. The light smell of oil spices the air.

This is the word of the small arms repairers of the 542nd Maintenance Company (Direct Support) from Fort Lewis, Wash.

“Basically we repair everything that fires a bullet,” said Sgt. Tanya Melson, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the section. “We don’t work on artillery, because we don’t support the big brigades. We repair everything from a 9 mm pistol to a 0.50 caliber machine gun or MK 19 (grenade launcher).” Since they arrived at Camp Taji in last November, the two-man shop has completed more than 250 work orders.

The .50 caliber machine gun has the most failures, said Spc. Matthew Willimason, the other small arms repairer of the shop. “The M-16 rifle is the easiest to fix. The hardest is the MK 19,” he added.

Lately the shop has been getting some M14 rifles, which they don’t usually work on at their home station. This weapon was replaced in most military units in the 1960s, but some Reserve and National Guard elements still have them. These rifles are mostly used for ceremonies and funerals back home, but in theater they are issued out as

individual weapons, said Williamson. It takes the longest time to get parts in for these weapons.

Both Williamson and Melson are very enthusiastic about their jobs and very knowledgeable when it comes to weapons.

When asked how he feels about his job, Williamson said the following: “I enjoy it, I love it. I like supporting people. If somebody comes in here with a broken weapon, whoever it may be, I will fix it. I like doing it, I like customers. I care about the job.”

Melson is equally upbeat about working with weapons and helping people. She chose this military occupational specialty because she likes working with her hands.

“Customers appreciate the armaments sections quick turnaround and on site service,” said Capt. Matthew Price, the company commander.

Indeed the shop goes to the customers when it comes time for the annual gauging of the weapons, said Melson. If it is regular maintenance business, the unit armorers usually bring in the weapons accompanied by the electronic preventive maintenance form 5988-E. The shop does have a lot of parts on hand in their bench stock, and they can repair a lot of the failures on the spot.

If the part is not available, they order it and notify the customer to bring in the weapon again, as soon as the part arrives. Because they have a great working relationship with the other two small arms shops on Camp Taji, they often help each other out with spare parts, Melson said.

Unfortunately, occasionally parts need to be replaced because Soldiers lose them as they disassemble their weapons, mostly losing springs. They also make the mistake of trying to fix things that they shouldn't touch at their level, Melson explained.

What some weapons that come through the shop lack is a little TLC (Tender Love and Care) in the form of some CLP (Cleaner, Lubricant and Preservative). “They need to clean their weapons. I have always been a stickler for that. If you take care of your weapon, it is going to take care of you. Take five-ten minutes before you go to bed and wipe it down,” Williamson suggested.

As for the .50 calibers, Soldiers should only use a thin coat of lubricant because it collects dust, but should lubricate the weapon well when they are getting ready to use it, Melson said. She is so familiar with this weapon, that she even cautions Soldiers and unit armorers about a bad bolt which needs to be identified and replaced, by the manufacturer’s number of 28210.

As the company commander noted, the Soldiers with the 45-series occupational specialties are essential to the success in Iraq. “All of our customer units depend on two systems when they hit the road; vehicle systems and weapons systems. You don’t hear about the unsung, behind the scenes heroes like Sgt. Melson and Spc. Williamson,” Price said, very proudly of his Soldiers and their support for units at Camp Taji.



Spc. Matthew Williamson and Sgt. Tanya Melson, both small arms/artillery repairers with the 542nd Maintenance Company (Direct Support) work on replacing the extractor on a M249 squad automatic weapon in their small workshop on Camp Taji on April 15.



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on a M249 squad automatic weapon in their small workshop on Camp Taji on April 15. The two-man team so far completed almost 250 jobs since they arrived in theater.



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